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THE GARDEN CALENDAR

A radio talk by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered through WRC and 39 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, December 30, 1930.

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So much for the current agricultural news and the weather. At this time I present my usual Tuesday Garden Calendar which is supposed to be cheerful and optimistic, chuck full of encouragement and bright prospects for everybody. I've been watching the markets and reading the trade papers to see what I could find that looked real encouraging for the fruit and vegetable interests of the country. The greatest consolation I get is that those of us who are engaged in the production of perishable food products are no worse off than our neighbors in other lines of farm production. I was interested in the report given yesterday by Dr. Warburton, Secretary of the Drought Relief Committee, in which he stated that in the earlier sections farmers had already planted a great many fall gardens and that more attention is being given to producing plenty of food.

That strikes me as sound practice and if everybody engaged in farming will produce plenty of fruits, vegetables, milk and butter, poultry and eggs, home-grown and cured pork, also fresh meats to some extent, they can at least have a good living at home and that is more than a lot of people who are out of employment have today. But, says the pessimist, that will only increase the difficulty and reduce the market for foods that are grown in a large way for sale. Perhaps, provided the farmer has the money with which to buy the food, but suppose he does not have the money, what then. As a matter of fact, it is good business and economy to produce most of the living for the farm family and the hired help right on the farm.

In every economic crisis through which the agriculture of any section of the country has passed, the home garden and other sources of home food supply have saved the day. When the boll weevil struck the cotton growing section, one of the first things that Dr. S. A. Knapp did was to start a campaign for gardens, poultry, pigs, and cows on every farm so that the people on cotton farms would have a living. Things haven't changed much and the same principles will apply today.

You folks who live in the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast States are already planting your gardens and will be using the products on your tables before many of us can even turn a spadeful of earth or plow a furrow. I am busy right now tinkering up a little greenhouse, using hotbed sash to cover it and a stove to heat it, and I expect to have a world of early cabbage, tomato, pepper and other vegetable plants, also plenty of flowering plants started when the weather becomes warm enough to plant them out. It is surprising how many early vegetables can be grown in a hotbed or a well protected coldframe, in fact, I know of several gardeners who are making a good profit from lettuce, radishes, carrots, beets, spring onions, and a number of other crops grown in hotbeds and coldframes.

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All things considered, I believe the outlook for fruit and vegetable production in 1931 is better than last year, however, we will know more definitely about that when the northern outlook report is issued a little later. Those of you who have your marketing connections well made are safe in going right on with a normal production. In some cases roadside markets are proving a boon to fruit and vegetable growers. In other cases the local town market is best, and in still other cases selling to chain stores is giving good returns. It has been my observation that the fruit and vegetable growers who have in the past adjusted their production very carefully to their market demands have had the least complaint to make. The past ten years has witnessed a great increase in large or specialized production, and many a local grower has seen his market slip away from him.

There's another angle to the present situation. Let me read you a letter.

Department of Agriculture,
Washington, D. C.

"The Commercial Club and several of the citizens of this city are planning to have garden clubs here next year. There are many suitable plats of ground that have been idle, and in order to help the people our object is to get them to use this ground in raising vegetables and flowers.

"If you have any literature which will help us in the organization and carrying out of our plans please send it to me."

The present condition of unemployment will undoubtedly lead thousands of families to plant gardens in backyards and on vacant lots, and produce a part of their food supply, further reducing the demand for fruits and vegetables on our markets. You cannot blame the people whose buying power has been curtailed for wanting to help themselves. My thought is that the growers of each section should get together in consultation with their county agricultural agent and work out a production plan for the coming year. In this they can be largely guided by the outlook report which has already been issued for the Southern States and will soon be prepared for the Northern States. The southern report warns against the overplanting of sweet potatoes, early cabbage, onions, tomatoes and watermelons for the market.